

REGULAR MEETING AND PUBLIC HEARING
OF THE FALLS CHURCH PLANNING COMMISSION
June 1, 2009
Council Chamber

1. CALL TO ORDER: Chair Lawrence called the meeting to order at 7:50 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL:

Members Present:	Ms. Hockenberry
	Mr. Kearney
	Mr. Lawrence
	Mr. Meeks
	Ms. Teates
	Mr. Wodiska

Member Absent:	Ms. Rodgers
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Administrative Staff Present:	Ms. Cotellessa, General Manager of Development Services and Planning Director
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Chair Lawrence advised the commissioners that Ms. Rodgers would not be present due to a work emergency.

3. ADOPTION OF AGENDA:

Ms. Teates moved, and Mr. Wodiska seconded, to adopt the agenda.

Upon voice vote, the motion passed unanimously.

4. PLANNING COMMISSIONER REPORTS:

Mr. Wodiska announced that he and his wife welcomed a new baby boy into his family, Andrew James Jefferson Wodiska, on May 19th, at 8:47 in the morning.

Ms. Hockenberry announced the Tinner Hill Blues Festival would take place June 12, 13, and 14, with a great schedule for every single night. She encouraged the audience to visit Tinnerhill.org, the web site that has the whole schedule on it.

5. PETITIONS: None.

6. PLANNING DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Ms. Cotellessa reminded the commissioners that the next meeting would be June 11th, a Town Hall meeting on a Thursday evening, to get public input on the North Washington Street Streetscape. That meeting was in lieu of the regular meeting scheduled for June 15.

Ms. Cotellessa wanted to make sure there would be a planning commissioner at each station and asked the commissioners to let her know what their preferences were for

an assigned space.

Chair Lawrence would not be able to attend but encouraged the other commissioners to take part. Mr. Wodiska said he would be able to make it.

Ms. Cotellessa advised the commissioners the next meeting after that would be on July 6, the Monday after the 4th of July weekend. The 20th of July would be a joint worksession with the Economic Development Authority which should be full of interesting information about things that are of mutual interest.

Ms. Cotellessa asked the commissioners to think about August and vacation schedules. Normally there is a meeting on the 3rd and 17th of August. August is a five Monday month and there might be flexibility regarding scheduling.

Chair Lawrence asked where the July 20th worksession would be held. Ms. Cotellessa said it would be held in the training room or over at the community center. It would be set up as a formal worksession so everybody could hear.

7. OLD BUSINESS: None.

8. NEW BUSINESS:

Arts and Cultural District Planning Presentation and Discussion

Ms. Cotellessa used a PowerPoint presentation to inform the commissioners the State of Virginia had passed Arts and Cultural District legislation which would take effect July 1st, that allows all municipalities in the State, if they so wish, to create arts and cultural districts. It has been in place in a few selected jurisdictions for a number of years but it was recently opened up.

Several members of the staff and members of the Arts and Cultural Task Force recently attended a conference in Fredricksburg and the commissioners were in receipt of materials from the conference and there were a few other things Ms. Cotellessa wanted to share.

Ms. Cotellessa emphasized it was good business to have arts in a community. Besides affecting quality of life, it actually does help to leverage economic well-being. On average, somebody coming in to see the arts will spend about 25 to 30 dollars a head on meals and lodging, transportation and various other things. It was interesting because people that come from out of town generally spend more than the residents, which was not surprising because residents take for granted some of the things that they have.

In the United States there is quite a bit of economic impact regarding the nonprofit arts industry: Full time jobs created, tax revenue created for localities, and household income created. This all gets to why the arts mean business as well as feeling good.

Ms. Cotellessa noted Falls Church was very fortunate to have Virginia Tech and some of their graduate classes in planning and other subjects nearby. Virginia Tech graduate students, many of whom are architects and planners in various fields, have to do a seminar as part of their graduate studies. This year some of the students

took on looking at the potential for an arts and cultural district in Falls Church, and looked at how we could actually create an arts and cultural district.

They divided into two groups and created two reports, both of which the commissioners had in full detail. The PowerPoint was just a general rundown on their presentation and is also available on the web site for the general public to look at.

The first group concentrated on what the options are: What kind of decisions Falls Church needs to make if it decided an arts and cultural district was a good thing in the downtown area. This group talked to our Arts and Cultural Task Force, which was examining everything they brought to them, everything from the conference and doing their own research, to determining whether such a district would be good in Falls Church and where it should be if we had one.

Overall they looked at zoning and comprehensive planning tools to help this district get formed, which included questions such as what incentives were needed or should we have to make it well populated and successful, what kind of exhibits should be looked at, and what opportunities does Falls Church have for Heritage Trails.

One of the things that the student group looked at were Falls Church's economically and socially diverse communities, particularly focusing on the Tinner Hill site, Henderson House, and various areas along Washington Street.

The question proposed was what makes a successful arts and cultural district. Well-displayed windows, places that people want to walk to, they want to stop at, they want to sit, buffered from street parking; the same type of things in many respects that make shopping successful as well.

The students provided examples throughout the country, as shown in the commissioners' literature, as to how some of these districts worked in other places. They talked about what the current zoning designations are, and how those could be used within the context of an arts and cultural district. They also talked about ways to improve zoning support for these districts which would feed into the current process with the Zoning Ordinance Advisory Committee.

They talked about how to do overlay zoning and what types of overlay zoning would be appropriate and where to create a Heritage Trail, which was great for school kids and great for people coming from out of town. They talked about various Heritage Trails that had been created and what its main points were, and why you walk through a Heritage Trail.

Ms. Cotellessa displayed the legislation, the full text of which was in the commissioners' package, which talked about Falls Church's ability to actually create such a district.

Some of the things to do to make it successful would be property tax exemptions; which they provided examples of, grants and loan assistance for various projects that support this district; making it easy for people to come in and set up an artist studio where they can live and work in the same place, having that mixed use live and work place; make the retail use flexible; let people set up displays that folks want to see as they come along; help with loans; and business tax breaks for

some of these businesses.

Ms. Cotellessa pointed out at the arts and cultural conference she attended, the point was made that it's not the kind of thing where if you build it, they will necessarily come. You've got to go and see what your base is, assess it before you get it started, and that is what the Arts and Cultural Task Force is doing, along with exploring what kind of incentives and awards are out there to go and bring similar businesses in or to foster what the City already has.

The students talked a lot about exhibits and the types of things that can be built. Some examples were murals such as the one at Bangkok Blues.

Many things can be done on line. Falls Church wasn't currently doing much of that yet but she suggested maybe through the library some of these things could be done on line. There were examples of other areas where there were web sites that had lots of images and photographs. Falls Church history would blend in well with that along with future work study packets.

Regarding community murals, the students provided examples in their displays of how the murals go up and go down and get changed.

Another suggestion was using bus shelters and the buses themselves as moving art.

Urban Heritage Trails is the way to get from one place to another in town and organizing what the City's cultural assets are and helping people to see the physical environment that surrounds the cultural growth. If you have one that runs through an arts and cultural district, like Falls Church should have, it helps to unify the experience and would be a good educational tool.

There were civil rights examples provided as well as African American history that Falls Church was looking to incorporate into the community.

Art in public places, places that people want to sit, waysides where people can rest and go through the process, having good graphics, good displays that people can stop at as they're walking along the street and read what are interesting areas, goes with everything that is talked about in the City's Comprehensive Plan.

How do you get pedestrians from one place to another, wanting to walk from one place to another? Have interesting things to do along the way. This was all from one part of the class who had worked on this project.

The other part of the class focused very specifically on the City and ways to incorporate the arts and cultural experience with aspects of urban design and create the City as a very welcoming place while they're trying to figure out who we are and where we are with this arts district. They researched all the history, they met and talked with people out in the field, talked with folks at the State Theater, up and down the street. They were looking to gain not only a perspective on what Falls Church's overall goals were, but to develop a series of key goals. Through this they came out with several points, all related to their original project, which was to develop specific strategies to make sure that the African American history that is central to the City's history is incorporated in redevelopment efforts.

They looked at what some of the guiding principals are. Education is key, sustainability, diversity, what is the sense of community, are all things that are the City's principles and what they believed match very closely with some of the African American themes. They looked at the physical layout of the City, where the corridors are, the main areas through Broad Street and Washington Street.

Gateways were discussed. How do we get into the community from the north, south, east and west; where are our buildings, where do people go to recreate; where are the parks; where are parking lots. Parking lots are negative spaces that they're trying to get around.

With historic properties, when you're trying to figure out where you could create a successful arts district, you need to know what is there first. How do you get there? How do the buses go around? How do we get back and forth from the Metro stations? Where are the bus routes and where are the bike routes?

Finally after looking at all of those and trying to develop a fairly cohesive area, they made a recommendation, outlined in yellow on the map shown, of an arts and cultural district. This is obviously under study by the Arts and Cultural Task Force but this was what the students from their input had recommended.

The students thought several things would contribute to the positive sense of this district. One was wayfinding. How do you get here from there? How do you find some of the things we're trying to promote, whether it's the African American theme or a music theme? As part of this cultural and arts thing, there has to be good signage to get people where they're going, reinforcing our identity and our brand. That goes into the City's current branding effort that needs to be carried all the way through on this wayfinding.

History gives a sense of the past and a sense of the future. To figure out what kind of signage we need to direct people around, we need to know who's coming, where are they going, and how they get there.

The students wanted to answer the question of "who". There are residents. There are workers who come to Falls Church, work here and then leave. There is general tourism, visitors that come from elsewhere and need to find out what it's about. They're interested in the culture but they need good directions on how to get there.

Where are they going? A lot of different places: Municipal facilities, might be doing research, might want to go to the library, to the schools, might want to come to City Hall, might be interested in just learning about some of our natural areas. They're going to some of our parks. We know the WO and D trail gets huge amounts of people coming in. That is both transportation to the City, through the City, and as a resource in and of itself.

Where else are they coming from? They're coming from Seven Corners, they're coming from the west end of town. Falls Church has venues that brings folks together in those areas.

How do they get there? WO and D trail, Metro stations, major roads, in through our gateways, walking, and biking.

The students talked a little bit about what kind of materials to use in the signage. Certainly pink granite is a part of who we are as a town. Maybe we ought to have bases on our wayfinding signs with pink granite. There is a lot of red brick, black wrought iron. They tried to pick up elements they saw throughout town that we might consider using in the wayfinding signage. A signage design competition was suggested.

With regard to public arts, they saw there was a need for public art in town and a potential for murals and signage on the infrastructure. Grates could be decorative. There was discussion about natural art and landscaping. Lot of reasons to have public art to engage the residents, pay homage to somebody, attract people and educate.

This group went through the Comprehensive Plan and pulled a lot of goals and information in the Plan and spoke to it in their report. When talking about education, The City's Comp Plan said that the schools were an important focus for community, social and cultural activities. In some places, such as the example from Berkeley, in a school environment they'll do an art project that combines the arts with their education.

There was talk about the high quality public facilities through some demonstration projects. Thomas Jefferson Elementary School has a great demonstration project which people need to come look at.

The City's Comp Plan also talks about being committed to environmental protection and preservation, looking at different ways to interact with the natural environment. One of the current topics was the North Washington Streetscape and using low impact design to pull that sustainable streetscape into plans for that area.

The Comp Plan says that trees are a valuable economic and aesthetic resource. In San Diego they also felt urban trees are important as part of their background and they called out artists and asked them to reflect that through art. There were very interesting takes on that.

There was further talk regarding human scale, pedestrian orientation, accessibility by foot, bicycle, public transit and automobile.

Community involvement and spirit was looked at. Ms. Cotellessa's opinion was that is the most significant feature of this community. Public spaces make that even stronger because people will come and gather in those spaces. If you make a gathering place right in the middle of these things, people will eat, visit businesses, and it becomes economically important as well.

Regarding George, there is current talk about doing some new bus shelters in all parts of town so folks not only are more encouraged to take public transportation but it offers an opportunity for art.

As to murals, there are several blank walls in town to use as an opportunity for interesting public art. It would also be great to do something nice with the manhole covers to integrate patterns into the spaces.

Ms. Cotellessa related in Charlotte they did an interesting project for transit.

They opened it up to the public and asked the citizens to write something and it ended up inside the busses. This was a form of art, a form of communication which was also fairly simple, changeable, and positive.

Bus shelters can be very boring or can be made alive with a little bit of art. Utility systems, where people stop and look, there is an opportunity for banners; and water features as well.

They looked at gateways, how to get from one place to another. Construction sites don't have to have big, ugly chain link fences around them. As Falls Church gets moving back into construction over the next few years, it would be good to think about some of the canvasses that could be used as things are being built.

Participatory art was discussed with competitions for various groups in town. Public art lessons, community bridges, gateways or a fountain, those very simple things can be very good examples of public art.

Mention was made of trail systems defining our heritage, trails defining pedestrian ways, making them inviting. There was talk about way stations: For example, have a rest stop halfway between the Metro and the downtown area, creating a place people want to be.

The students went out and got lots of examples and presented the Arts and Cultural Task Force with a lot of information. Ms. Cotellessa admitted it was great to have some big ideas and see what other communities are doing and what we might do.

Ms. Cotellessa stated her purpose in bringing this before the Planning Commission was to have the commissioners think about all these things as they go into the Comp Plan in the fall. They'll be looking at a lot of things: At economic development, at the environment, historic resources, and arts and cultural will play a big part of that too.

Chair Lawrence thanked Ms. Cotellessa and the graduate students for a wonderful presentation.

Chair Lawrence asked if there was any stimulus money available for public art. Ms. Cotellessa replied there are public transportation enhancements that can include some aspects of public art. One of the things being looked at is capital funding for bus shelters. Transportation enhancements might be picked up on; she wasn't aware of a specific stimulus fund for art but there were aspects of art in all of this.

After viewing the PowerPoint and the area recommended for arts and cultural, Chair Lawrence inquired if the area needed to be totally contiguous. Ms. Cotellessa responded that every community is different but the consensus was you can make a district that was composed of several different places as a community.

Mr. Kearney commended the graduate students for their fine work. He remarked there are so many different studies going on and that he hadn't even heard of this one until recently, and thought there may be others he is not aware of. He noted they seem to be honing in on the same areas, the same issues, and the same ideas. He wondered if there wasn't a venue where they could all be tied together. He expressed concern about the North Washington Street study, which he personally

thought was misguided, spending money where we shouldn't be, but he was intrigued by the overlay and the branding study.

He further noted while one of the group's study was focused on Tinner Hill and the Heritage Foundation, he didn't see anything about the civil war background in Falls Church which he thought ought to be highlighted as part of this as well.

Mr. Kearney's last point was he thought the size of the district that is being suggested was enormous and if the district is going to be created with tax incentives and other financial incentives from the City, he was nervous about the proposed size and thought it needed to be a little more contained, perhaps two discrete areas that need to be focused on rather than spreading it out.

Mr. Kearney also inquired who was on the arts and cultural task force.

Ms. Hockenberry said she had made a couple of reports but one of them was a night Mr. Kearney wasn't present.

Chair Lawrence added the Arts and Cultural Task Force is composed of eight or ten different city organizations. The library has a representative, City Council does, as well as the Planning Commission. The arts and cultural part was separate from branding. He didn't think this study was part of what the Task Force is doing. They just happened to be doing it for their graduate studies and went to the Task Force and talked to them.

Ms. Hockenberry provided a brief history of the task force and admitted she shared the concerns of Mr. Kearney regarding different studies and bringing them to a point.

She also thought there was a difficulty in that the students' suggestions for the Historic District didn't include Cherry Hill.

Ms. Hockenberry felt this would play prominently in dealing with the zoning rewrite. For instance, currently there was one entertainment tax and the only place to get taxed for entertainment in Falls Church City is the bowling alley. Ms. Hockenberry had been very proactive in not having taxes placed on the State Theater and places similar to that. One idea was cover charges not being taxed or some sort of incentive. For example, if you want music or other types of activities in an area, then you can have incentives going for that and it can be very specific as far as within that area but also meeting special criteria. It could be the BPOL tax, property tax or personal property tax.

With regard to zoning, Ms. Hockenberry asserted at first the Cultural Task Force didn't want to deal with that but she thought it's going to have to be dealt with somewhere or left open for future ideas to come because you can bring forth what you want by the incentives.

She gave the example that what they were trying to do with the Tinner Hill Festival was to bring publicity to all the businesses and restaurants in the City; not asking for any money but there would be a City map showing the specific participation going on. There are approximately 50 businesses and restaurants participating that will be on the map.

Ms. Cotellessa thought Mr. Kearney's points were valid. Regarding drawing all of this together, she thought that was the job of the Planning Commission and the way to draw it all together was through the Comprehensive Plan.

She also mentioned Virginia Tech this fall and possibly in the spring wants to do a studio, which in this case was a group of approximately 20 graduate students, on a major project such as a score card on the Comp Plan in Falls Church, where we are in terms of how to organize this discussion. The other is to look at the part of town up near Seven Corners and what can be done with that area.

Ms. Cotellessa informed the commissioners the EDA hired the former planning director of Arlington as a planning consultant and he will work with the studio in the fall trying to direct them through this project which may result in really new ideas for Falls Church. Tying in the whole North Washington Streetscape idea was the first low impact design in the City's streetscape that has evolved into what is it going to look like versus Broad Street.

The branding that was talked about involved several things, being a green community and talk about food, and our arts and cultural resources. When you think of places like Alexandria, they have a lot of association headquarters there. Falls Church is starting to get a lot of businesses here in the City that involve the environment, leading green businesses, and that is not necessarily different than arts and cultural in that they can blend. You might be talking about using opportunities to create natural streetscapes as part of a green environment.

As to other ways to blend everything together, Ms. Cotellessa suggested natural art and the pink granite in the City. Falls Church could do a natural art focus which might be a good feed into environmental things.

She hoped all the commissioners would be talking to the branding folks and their projects and the way we and the schools do things. She thought Falls Church and its 2.2 square miles, could really make a name for itself in trying out these things that by traditional zoning methods or traditional development is hard to accomplish. Ms. Cotellessa suggested to try it and if it doesn't work, take it down but at least try some of these things to see if they work.

Ms. Teates was grateful for the presentation. She remarked the Victorians have a walking tour of the City of Falls Church, with clusters around various areas of the City.

With regard to overlay districts, she'd liked a more creative way of doing it without it being a physical place since it's scattered throughout the City with so many things going on. She realized currently there is some kind of definition of the historic area because the business condo her and her husband own at Independence Square is zoned historical, even though that building itself is not historical but because it is next to the Falls Church. There are limits as to what businesses can do there. In her case she thought it really silly to have rules for Independence Square because it's a fairly modern office building complex and they have to deal with that because they're in the historic district.

Ms. Teates also related that Thomas Jefferson Elementary School has a master outdoor classroom planned and they're taking some steps to put some of that in. It's a very comprehensive plan involving lots of different pieces, including interactive story areas, bird blinds, and specialized play areas for children with lots of natural material. Mt. Daniel has one being planned but is not yet completed.

She also announced they would probably be updating the watershed management plan, which could be something also looked at with the Comp Plan this fall.

Ms. Teates is on the VPIS board and they have a lot of different plans on what they want to do. She thought they might have to bring in the different community groups to make sure they're on board with everything that was going on.

VPIS currently is putting in smaller city signs on the side roads, on Little Falls and on West. They are the typical Victorian-style signs which she didn't know if that was going to work with the branding but hoped it did.

Ms. Cotellessa added she wanted to give the commissioners time to look at this and absorb the materials. The Arts and Cultural Task Force will be doing something similar, where an inventory is put together of what we are doing and what we've already done, taking everything in and putting them all in one place to see.

Ms. Hockenberry advised the commissioners that Barb Cram from Arts and Cultural has gathered a list of everything going on in the City.

Mr. Kearney asked if they could view the CACT in progress, which Ms. Cotellessa reported wasn't completed yet. Ms. Teates said they needed to be encouraged to move forward because if the Planning Commission starts to look at Comp Plan revisions in the fall, they need to see their plans. Mr. Kearney added now is the time to see progress reports and he was not aware of the studies going on.

Mr. Wodiska explained the CACT draft was presented to Council last April with a few minor revisions they had adopted two or three meetings ago but essentially was the same document. At that time they brought it to the City Council and they weren't ready to sign off on officially declaring Falls Church as pedestrian friendly and as a result they were going to put it towards the Planning Commission and the City Council, and say can you consider this in the rezoning and in the Comprehensive Plan. He believed the draft from a year ago was essentially the same document and offered to share his copy of the draft.

Ms. Hockenberry related the main problem was there were statements in the draft report that were counter to the new transportation plan that had just been adopted by City Council as an addition to the Comp Plan.

Ms. Cotellessa said she would provide that for the commissioners.

Ms. Hockenberry further explained that there was a huge committee a couple of years ago to explore whether they were going to name a historic district. Nobody really wanted to have it designated because of the rules and regulations that would accompany it and that was not presented along that line but they did have good report that Debra Gee has.

Chair Lawrence inquired whether they should look at a worksession about the Comp Plan for the first meeting in August.

Ms. Cotellessa thought the public review document for zoning was being targeted to be out in September. Module One went back to the consultant for a redo; Module Two was halfway through and would be going back to them. They were trying to clean up the document as it came from the consultant for public review. That would probably be happening in the fall.

Chair Lawrence submitted one of the reasons they were having the worksession with the EDA was if the Planning Commission needed a separate section on economic development, they could get the EDA involved and not put it all on them and have it come back; get people in on the beginning rather than wait until the end.

Chair Lawrence asked the commissioners to let Ms. Cotellessa know if they would be available for the regularly scheduled second meeting in August.

9. OTHER BUSINESS: None.

10. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - MAY 18, 2009

Mr. Wodiska requested the minutes be put on line as a PDF document, where he can search terms, instead of posting it as a scanned document, which Ms. Cotellessa acknowledged she had bought the software to do just that.

Ms. Teates moved, and Mr. Wodiska seconded, to approve the minutes as amended.

Upon voice vote, the motion passed unanimously. (Mr. Kearney and Mr. Meeks abstained.)

11. ADJOURNMENT:

Ms. Teates moved, and Ms. Hockenberry seconded, to adjourn the meeting at 8:53 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Noted and Approved:

Ann Hieber
Recording Secretary

Suzanne Cotellessa, AICP
Planning Director

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